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ABSTRACT

This self-instruction manual contains nine lessons on news writing. They are: (1) what is news?; (2) how do you report news?; (3) polish your style; (4) write a better sentence; (5) getting the facts; (6) you're on your own--writing a news story from a collection of facts; (7) practice makes perfect--more news writing from a collection of facts; (8) be your own editor; and (9) writing for fun and profit--examples of good feature stories. (KM)

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INSTANT WRITING COURSE

for writing news and feature stories

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE – MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

AC 014 155

INSTANT

WRITING COURSE

by Joseph J. Marks, Editor
Extension & Research Information
Michigan State University

Self-Instruction Manual

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

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---To Donald E. Gregg, Extension Publications Editor, Michigan State University, this "editor's editor" who put the manual in more readable form.

---To my "students" (undergrads, grads and extension personnel) who urged the publication of an "Instant Writing Course" they could work into tight schedules.

WRITING

News and etc...

This packet has information -- and advice -- on writing.

There is always danger in giving people advice. A young student summed it up in this brief biography:

"Socrates was a Greek. Socrates was a philosopher. He gave people a lot of good advice. They poisoned him."

Here's the advice anyway.

Lesson #1. . . . . .

WHAT IS NEWS?

News is a report of something literally new.

News is:

1) Timeliness -- immediate or near the present -- the first reason for a news story. Without timeliness a news story is either history or prediction.

2) Proximity -- close -- physically and/or psychologically -- to the audience and point of publication or broadcast. Editors prefer "local" stories.

3) Importance -- how "big" and important is the idea, event, situation or person.

News involves at least one of these factors:

1) Conflict -- all kinds of struggles: man versus his environment, man versus man, etc.

2) Progress -- improvements made by man: research development, better production methods, education, new equipment, improvements in living standards, human relations, etc.

3) Unusualness -- rare, odd and sometimes unforeseen ideas, events or situations.

4) Human interest -- ideas, events or situations which touch human emotions. Human interest events may only arouse casual curiosity, or they may incite anger or fear or elicit joy, sadness, compassion or some other feeling.

Remember, too: Stories have the best chance of acceptance if they appeal to the policies of the editor.

Lesson #2

HOW DO YOU REPORT NEWS?

Structuring Your Story

1. Use the 5 W's and an H!

Who -- Who said it? Who is it about?

What -- What happened? (Importance counts.)

Where -- Where did it happen? (Remember proximity makes it news.)

When -- When did it happen? (Remember timeliness.)

Why -- Why is it important? (Remember policy.)

How -- How did it happen? (Unusual?)

2. Make It Readable

The best way to improve your writing readability is to use...

-- Short sentences (best single thing you can do...and easiest)

-- Short paragraphs

-- Easy words

-- Personal words

-- Active verbs

Short sentences. For today's mass audiences, news stories averaging between 15 and 20 words per sentence are easy reading. Sentences longer than 30 words may be hard to understand.

Short paragraphs. Keep paragraphs short. And vary them -- from one word to five average sentences. Remember, a 100-word paragraph looks mighty long in a narrow newspaper column. Editors don't like them. Neither do readers.

Easy words. Use short, simple words -- in place of longer, many-syllable words with the same meaning. When a technical or difficult word must be used, explain it as simply as possible.

Personal words. Words like "you," "we," a person's name, direct quote, etc., give your copy more human interest. Admittedly, this kind of personalization is more often used in "feature" rather than "hard" news stories. But it is still a good technique for holding reader interest.

Active verbs. Action verbs keep a story moving and "grab" the reader more than "to be" verbs that show little action.

3. Get To The Point...Fast!

4. Put Most Important Points First.

Editors chop stories to make them fit available space -- usually from the bottom. So if you've got something essential to the story at the bottom of your copy, it might not make it into print.

Most news writers often use the inverted pyramid style:

Most important fact.

Second most im-

portant fact

and so on

down to

least

impor-

ta

nt

Most people whiz through newspapers, reading headlines and maybe the first paragraph or two. So, get your important facts into the first paragraph; the first sentence is even better.

Lesson #3

POLISH YOUR STYLE

There's always a better way to write it. Any time you rewrite something, you will probably improve it. On the next page, try your hand at simplifying words and phrases.

Put easy word or words in blanks.

Complex, non-technical words: Replace with words that are more common and more easily understood. Sometimes two simple words are better than one complex word.

deficiency _____ remainder _____

equivalent _____ approximately _____

construct _____ illustrate _____

insufficient _____ beneficial _____

Empty words and phrases:

So as to allow _____ Keep in mind _____

Make plans for _____ Adjacent to _____

In order to _____ At the present time _____

Disposed of on the market _____

List a description of _____

Are suspected of having _____

It is advisable to begin _____

More uniformly shaped _____

With the exception of _____

Note: "Answers" on next page.

Here are some possible answers

deficiency	shortage, lack of	remainder	what's left, rest
equivalent	equal, same as	approximately	almost, about
construct	build	illustrate	show, give
insufficient	not enough	beneficial	helpful, good
So as to allow	to allow	Keep in mind	remember
Make plans for	plan	Adjacent to	next to, near
In order to	to	At the present time	now
Disposed of on the market	sold	List a description of	describe
Are suspected of having	might have	It is advisable to begin	begin
More uniformly shaped	alike	With the exception of	except

Lesson #4

WRITE A BETTER SENTENCE

When you write or rewrite, try to shorten sentences and give them more action. In doing so, consider the context of your article. You may have a different "answer" than we do for the following, because you thought of the sentence in a different context than we did. That doesn't mean you're wrong. But your sentence should be easier to read than the original. And it should contain an active verb where possible.

Rewrite the following sentences, changing the vague nouns into active verbs:*

Example: Consumption (drink, eat, use)

(Poor) Your consumption of milk should be a quart daily.

(Better) Drink a quart of milk daily.

*(Note: "Answers" on page 12.)

(Poor) Strict adherence must be given to safety precautions when using these insecticides.

(Better)

(Poor) Elimination of these pests calls for a strict insect control program.

(Better)

(Poor) Application of sufficient amounts of fertilizer will increase your cotton yields.

(Better)

In the following sentences, change the passive verbs into active in the present tense:

Example: Passive - The right fertilizer must be used by you for high corn yields.

Active - Use the right fertilizer for high corn yields.

(Passive) - Airplanes were used by these farmers to dust their cotton.

(Active) -

(Passive) - Each pint carton should be labeled and this label must be recorded on the information sheet for the laboratory.

(Active) -

(Passive) - An improvement in quality has been made.

(Active) -

(Passive) - A sharp decrease in profits was noted.

(Active) -

(Passive) - Evaporation of liquid takes place.

(Active) -

(Passive) - When an application of wax is made to this surface a brilliance is imparted to it.

(Active) -

(Passive) - When application of pressure is employed by the operator, the machine is activated.

(Active) -

Possible Answers ("Better Sentences")

(Poor) Strict adherence must be given to safety precautions when using these insecticides.

(Better) Be careful when using these insecticides.

(Poor) Elimination of these pests calls for a strict insect control program.

(Better) Follow a strict control program to eliminate these pests.

(Poor) Application of sufficient amounts of fertilizer will increase your cotton yields.

(Better) Apply fertilizer to increase cotton yields.

(Passive) - Airplanes were used by these farmers to dust their cotton.

(Active) - Farmers air-dusted their cotton.

(Passive) - Each pint carton should be labeled and this label must be recorded on the information sheet for the laboratory.

(Active) - Label each pint carton and record it on the information sheet for the laboratory.

(Passive) - An improvement in quality has been made.

(Active) - They improved it.

(Passive) - A sharp decrease in profits was noted.

(Active) - Profits fell sharply.

(Passive) - Evaporation of liquid takes place.

(Active) - It dries.

(Passive) - When an application of wax is made to this surface a brilliance is imparted to it.

(Active) - It shines when waxed.

(Passive) - When application of pressure is employed by the operator, the machine is activated.

(Active) - Push to start.

Lesson #5

GETTING THE FACTS

In writing a news story, make sure you have all the pertinent facts. Think back to WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY and HOW. Most news stories contain all of these. Sometimes you can omit one or more -- like why or how -- if they are implied or already understood by your audience.

IN THE BEGINNING...

The most important part of a news story is the first paragraph -- the lead. It should contain the most important information in the story.

Consider who, what, when, where, why and how when writing that first paragraph. Most leads contain more than one of these, but here are some examples of leads that each feature one of the five Ws or the H.

Who:

The 1970 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr. Norman E. Borlaug, will speak at Michigan State University, Tuesday, May 11, 1971.

Why:

To lend a hand to Michigan's rural communities, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation has awarded a $634,000 grant to Michigan State University.

How:

Harvest corn at 35 percent dry matter and chop corn plants finely for top quality corn silage, advises Leyton Nelson, Michigan State University crop scientist.

What:

The hired labor problem boils down to an age gap, wage gap and communication gap, contends Leonard Kyle, Michigan State University agricultural economist.

When:

Planting corn before May 10 really pays off, reports Elmer Rossman, Michigan State University crop scientist.

Where:

From an oat field in Berrien County, Michigan, the cereal leaf beetle has spread throughout most of the grain producing areas of the Midwest.

Who, What, When, Where, Why and How:

(who) (how) (what)
Dr. Norman Ernest Borlaug will present the Distinguished Lectures
(where) (when)
in Agriculture and Natural Resources at Michigan State University, Tuesday,
(why)
May 11, to tell MSU faculty about his latest wheat research.

Lesson #6

YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN

O.K., now write a news story from the facts on the next page. Remember: short sentences, short paragraphs...and get to the point.

Write for the Lansing State Journal (daily, capital city, state university city) or Michigan State University's State News.

Think! What is most important for them: who, what, when, where, why or how?

Write this as a news story for the State News or Lansing State Journal. Do not turn the page until you have written your story.

1. Dr. C. A. Lassiter is a professor in MSU's dairy department. He is also chairman of the department.

2. Dr. Robert M. Cook is associate professor of dairy at MSU.

3. Drs. Lassiter and Cook will present research papers at the 8th International Dairy Congress, Sidney, Australia, Oct. 12-15.

4. Drs. Lassiter and Cook are dairy scientists.

5. Drs. Lassiter and Cook will leave MSU Sunday (Oct. 4) for a trip around the world to visit and study major animal-agricultural research stations.

6. At the Dairy Congress, Lassiter will report on the use of nonprotein nitrogen in dairy cattle rations; Cook will present a paper on pesticide removal from livestock.

7. Drs. Cook and Lassiter will visit research stations in New Zealand, Australian, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands and Great Britain on their world trip.

Your most important facts in this story are who -- because these are local guys from a local university -- and what they are going to do. The audience is a local campus audience largely.

There are two whats -- presenting the papers and taking the world trip. We thought the world trip was more important because a lot of MSU faculty present papers every week.

But you wouldn't be "wrong" if you rated the papers over the world trip...just so you got both down on paper quickly.

Here's one way...

NEWS RELEASE HEADING
(Name and address of your organization)

Contact: (Name)

(Phone) (Date)

RELEASE: Immediate

TWO MSU SCIENTISTS
ON WORLD TRIP

EAST LANSING, Mich. -- Two Michigan State University dairy scientists leave Sunday (Oct. 4) for a trip around the world to visit and study major animal-agricultural research stations.

Dr. C. A. Lassiter, professor and chairman of the MSU dairy science department, and Dr. Robert M. Cook, associate professor of dairy, will present research papers at the Eighth International Dairy Congress, Sydney, Australia, Oct. 12-15.

Lassiter will report on nonprotein nitrogen uses in dairy cattle rations; Cook will present a paper on pesticide removal from livestock.

Then they will visit research stations in New Zealand, Australia, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Israel, Italy, Netherlands and Great Britain.

###

P.S. Also note release format. Information at top should show editor where the release came from and where he can get more information. Leave room at top for the editor to mark the copy for a headline, size of type, etc. (leave 2 to 3 inches). Double or triple space copy.

Lesson #7

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Practice in writing always helps.

So, here are more examples to try out. This time use your imagination. Make up quotes if you like to see if you can increase the human interest angle of the story.

Following each list of facts we have releases prepared from the information by field staff in Michigan State University's Cooperative Extension Service. Write the first example for the Standish paper (weekly in small rural village); the second, for more general release.

Example A

Write story from the following:

Mrs. Jean Winter, a Standish sewing instructor, has just completed a series of six lessons on sewing with stretchy knits.

The lessons were sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Service, and about 70 area women attended.

Mrs. Winter will present the lessons again beginning May 10 in the Standish town hall. Anyone interested should contact:

Miss Susan Smalley
Extension Home Economist
County Building
Standish, Michigan 48658

Mrs. Winter pointed out that one must "think negative" when sewing with the new knits because many of the techniques are the opposite of Bishop-method and other traditional teachings.

For example, knits should be stretched when sewn, while wovens aren't.

Home sewers can make as many as six pieces of lingerie for $8, and a snowmobile suit for under $20.

Possible Story From Example A

(Heading -- including your name,
address and phone number)

RELEASE: Immediate

70 WOMEN COMPLETE
KNIT SEWING CLASS

STANDISH, Mich. -- Can a Bishop-method seamstress find true happiness working with quick and easy knits?

"Yes," say about 70 area women after attending a series of Cooperative Extension Service programs conducted by Mrs. Jean Winter, Standish sewing instructor.

Mrs. Winter told the women to "think negative" when sewing with the new, stretchy knits since many of the techniques are the reverse of traditional methods.

"For example," Mrs. Winter said, "you take great pains not to stretch woven material when you sew. But you should stretch knit fabrics."

The women learned they can sew six pieces of knit lingerie for only $8; or a snowmobile suit for under $20.

Mrs. Winter will repeat the six-lesson series beginning May 10 in the Standish Town Hall. Anyone interested in signing up should contact: Miss Susan Smalley, Extension Home Economist, County Building, Standish, Mich. 48658.

###

Example B

Miss Joanne Thurber is a clothing and textiles specialist for the Cooperative Extension Service at Michigan State University.

She has interpreted a new Federal Trade Commission ruling which requires that all items of wearing apparel must carry a permanent label giving instructions for care and maintenance.

The ruling will go into effect July 3, 1972.

She mentioned that fibers, fabric structure, trimmings, dyeing process and interfacing fabrics all affect the washability of a garment. The new care labels would take all these factors into account.

The labels will tell consumers -- when they buy a garment -- about how much it will cost for care, whether it should be washed, machine drycleaned or commercially drycleaned.

If consumers cooperate, the new program can cut down the amount and cost of home laundry errors.

Possible Story From Example B

(Heading -- including your name,
address and phone number)

THE "WHY" BEHIND
PERMANENT CARE LABELING

EAST LANSING -- "Washable fibers do not necessarily make a washable fabric," warns Joanne Thurber, extension clothing specialist at Michigan State University.

Fabric structure, trimming, dyeing processes, and interfacing fabrics also affect the "washability" of a garment, she points out.

A new Federal Trade Commission (FTC) ruling requires that after July 3, 1972, all items of wearing apparel carry a permanent label with care instructions.

"The new care labels should become an important part of your shopping decisions," says Miss Thurber. "They'll give you an idea -- at the time of purchase -- what the cost and effort of care will be. For example, if you have to dryclean rather than launder a dress, the added cost may not be worthwhile to you."

The requirement came about partly because of an FTC hearing which disclosed the extent and cost of laundry errors, according to Miss Thurber. Mistakes in caring for clothes are quite normal when there are no specific instructions to the contrary, she explains.

The success of the labeling program depends largely on consumer willingness to read and follow the instructions, she says.

###

Lesson #8

BE YOUR OWN EDITOR

Check your copy closely before you finally submit it for publication. If possible, have someone else check it, too.

The next example won't win any Pulitzer Prize. But look at the original...then look at the edited version. Still not a real good story, but a lot of useless copy is weeded out...

RELEASE: Immediate

TRASH SOLUTIONS
FOR FARMERS (original version)

EAST LANSING, Mich. -- Once again many Michigan farmers are faced by the annual problem of what to do with crop residues.

There is no simple answer to what should be done with crop residues and organic trash that collect in some fields, but Michigan State University soil specialists have come up with a number of suggestions.

According to the specialists, fall handling of residues will vary with the type of operation farmers are engaged in. On livestock farms there is the opportunity to salvage crop residues for food. Such operations, however, would probably only be economical where herd maintenance is involved, rather than when rapid gains are sought.

In many cases the residues may be left on the soil surface until spring. This practice is good insurance against wind and water erosion. A drawback in this instance is that the movement of fall and winter fertilizer applications into the soil can be restricted by the cover of residue.

Some cash crop farmers like to either shred or disk crop residues in the fall. Shredding reportedly makes it difficult for insects which may be in the residues, to survive winter temperatures. Disking is often preferred because it encourages partial decomposition of crop residues because they are mixed with the soil. Under these conditions, fertilizer applications are not recommended unless done before disking. There is too great an opportunity for movement of fertilizer elements when they are applied to a smooth surface with little vegetation cover, the specialists noted.

###

RELEASE: Immediate

TRASH SOLUTIONS
FOR FARMERS (actual editing)

EAST LANSING, Mich. -- ~~Once again many Michigan farmers are faced by the annual problem of what to do with crop residues.~~

~~There is no simple answer to what should be done with crop residues and organic trash that collect in some fields~~, but Michigan State University soil specialists have ~~come up with a number of~~ suggestions.

~~According to the specialists~~, fall handling of residues ~~will vary~~ with ~~the type of~~ operation ~~farms are engaged in.~~ ~~For~~ livestock ~~farms~~, ~~there is the opportunity~~ to salvage crop residues for ~~feed~~. ~~Such operations~~, ~~however~~, would ~~probably only be~~ economical where herd maintenance is involved, ~~rather than~~ when rapid gains are sought.

~~In many cases the~~ residues ~~may be~~ left on the soil surface until spring. ~~This practice is good insurance against~~ wind and water erosion. ~~A drawback in this instance is that~~ the movement of fall and winter fertilizer applications into the soil ~~can be restricted by the cover of residue.~~

Some cash crop farmers ~~like to either~~ shred or disk crop residues in the fall. ~~Shredding reportedly~~ makes it ~~difficult~~ for insects ~~which may be~~ in the residues, to survive winter ~~temperatures.~~ Disking ~~is often preferred because it~~ encourages partial decomposition of crop residues ~~because they are~~ mixed with the soil. ~~Under these conditions, fertilizer applications are not recommended unless done before~~ disking. ~~There is too great an opportunity for movement of~~ fertilizer ~~elements~~ when ~~they are~~ applied to a ~~smooth~~ surface with little vegetation ~~cover, the specialists noted.~~

###

TRASH SOLUTIONS
FOR FARMERS (edited version)

EAST LANSING, Mich. -- It's not easy to dispose of crop residues, but Michigan State University soil specialists have some suggestions.

They say fall handling of residues varies with each farm operation. Livestock farmers can salvage crop residues for feed. However, this is only economical where herd maintenance is involved, not when rapid gains are sought.

Residues are often left on the soil surface until spring to prevent wind and water erosion. However, this may restrict the movement of fall and winter fertilizer applications into the soil.

Some cash crop farmers shred or disk crop residues in the fall. This makes it hard for insects living in the residues to survive the winter. Disking encourages partial decomposition of crop residues by mixing them with the soil. Farmers are advised not to fertilize after disking as fertilizer tends to move through the soil when applied to a surface with little vegetation.

###

Lesson #9

WRITING FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Feature Stories

Writing is fun when you put "ordinary" facts into a form that's intriguing to read. The profit comes when readers say, "I read that!" "I liked it!" "I understood it!"

This is what the "feature" story does. It differs from straight news in one respect -- its intent. A news story provides information about an event, idea or situation. Features have one or more of the following purposes: (1) to interpret or add depth and color to the news; (2) to instruct; or (3) to entertain.

The feature doesn't usually follow the inverted pyramid style of the news story.

The hard news story lead based on one of the five "W's" or "How" is seldom appropriate for a feature story. The feature lead "sets the stage" for the story and generally cannot stand alone.

A feature lead must interest the reader. It's the "grabber" that gets him into the story and keeps him going.

Many rules for news writing also apply to feature writing: short sentences, easy words, personal words and active verbs. But feature stories are often more fun to write, because you can be more creative.

The following compares a "straight" news story and a "feature" containing basically the same facts, done by an entomology student taking his first writing course at MSU.

He experienced both fun and profit when he used his imagination. He got his story told, printed and read.

News Release Heading

Contact: (Name)

(Phone) (Date)

EDITOR'S NOTE: Here's what happened when Larry Connor, graduate researcher in MSU's Department of Entomology, was asked to write a story on the "insect of the year." He wrote two: one on the "insect of the year" award...and the other on an interview with the winner -- the European corn borer. The stories are "light" but they carry a lot of sound, factual material.

INSECT OF THE YEAR (straight news story)

EAST LANSING, Mich. -- The Insect of the Year, the Michigan insect causing the "most problems for growers and entomologists during 1970," is the European corn borer.

Dr. Richard Sauer, survey entomologist at Michigan State University, has selected the European corn borer for the rather dubious honor on the basis of the amount of damage it does, and the different types of plants it infests.

Introduced into the United States in 1909, the borer feeds on a wide range of plant materials -- over 200 different types. In Michigan, corn is its "favorite" food. But it also attacks snap beans, potatoes and peppers.

"The European corn borer may become a problem on fruit in the future," Sauer said. "It was found on peaches, apples and cantaloupe this year.

(more)

"On corn, the borer infests the stalks and sometimes the ears of corn. Normally it feeds on the stems of potato, but in 1970 it was also found in the tubers," Sauer reported.

"The borer is really nasty with peppers -- it feeds inside the pepper itself -- making it completely unmarketable."

The borer also feeds on weeds and stemmed flowers, making it tough to eliminate it from an area, said Sauer.

###

THE WINNER SPEAKS OUT (feature story)

EAST LANSING, Mich. -- When word reached us that the European corn borer had been selected the "insect of the year," we wondered what its reaction would be to the news.

So, we decided to ask -- out in the middle of the corn fields.

"Oh -- this is nothing new. Farmers have been calling us names ever since we entered this country back in 1909," E. C. Borer smirked.

"Why did you stay in the corn field all winter?" we asked.

"It's safe for one thing -- and it's easy," said E. C. B. "We eat all summer and close up shop to wait out the winter. We don't even bother to pupate in the fall. We do that in the spring when the weather is warm."

"What happens then?" we asked.

"We cut an exit hole in the wall of the corn stalk, spin a thin cocoon, and slide out of our larval (worm-like) skin into our pupal case. We emerge in May or June as adults."

"Why then?"

"Dummy! That's when the nice young, tender corn plants are starting to grow," exclaimed E. C. B. "We mate quickly and the females lay eggs on the underside of the corn leaves. The larvae hatch and feed on the leaf surface inside the whorl of the plant. Later we start burrowing into the stalk where we destroy the food channels."

"Ah -- doesn't that interfere with the growth of the corn plant?"

(more)

"Yea -- they are weakened and usually don't produce very many large ears of corn -- but we don't try to kill them. We are not that type of insect, you know."

"Why not?"

"Well -- first we want some corn around next year," E. C. B. said smartly. "But most important -- we have a second generation of adults that emerge in August. They have to have something to eat, too!"

"Guess you like corn pretty well, don't you?"

"Sure, but we also like potatoes, snap beans and peppers. We also like stemmed flowers and weeds -- that's why we are so hard to get rid of. Last year, though, we found something we really liked -- apples, peaches and cantaloupe."

Groovy, we thought. So we decided to ask if there wasn't something that interfered with E. C. B.'s success story.

"Well -- we have had it easy here in North America. When we left Europe we left a lot of parasites and predators which (gulp) like to feed on us."

"That's not very nice," we said.

"But then some of those entomologists tried introducing some of the parasites to control our numbers."

"What happened then?" we asked.

"Well -- four of them -- one fly and three small wasps -- decided they liked the new country, too -- so they decided to stay."

(more)

E. C. B. looked nervous.

"You don't sound too thrilled about them," we commented.

"I'm not -- and I'm even less thrilled about insecticides. Farmers also try to control us by plowing the corn stubble under in the fall -- but we survive."

That's confidence for you, we thought.

"There's one other thing that really gets us," said E. C. Borer.

"What's that?"

"Ice fishermen -- they cut open the corn stalks and use us for fish bait. Can you imagine that?"

Sure can -- especially if the guy's a farmer.

#ljc#

KEEP ON WRITING

The best way to test your skill as a feature writer is to write feature stories. Then get opinions from readers and writers. In the following example note these writing techniques: 1) transitions; 2) interest-building devices; 3) purpose; and 4) "kicker." See comments about these at the end of this story.

MINKS' NEW "DADDY"

EAST LANSING, Mich. -- The homely baby mink, its eyes barely open, was a little nervous. The scientist holding the little rascal was delighted.

The tiny "kit," one of a litter of four, was the first ever born to an artificially bred female mink.

Now, with artificial breeding, a good male can breed 100 females -- six times as many as he could naturally. By selecting males with the best fur quality for breeding purposes, the odds for high quality mink coats are greatly improved.

The scientist holding the tiny mink was Dr. Richard Aulerich, Michigan State University mink researcher. He and Dr. Robert K. Ringer, MSU poultry scientist, had spent nearly two years developing a way to artificially mate the temperamental, nervous, often vicious mink.

It hadn't been easy. Male mink only produce sperm during March. Females ovulate only after a male has mated with them.

Artificial insemination (breeding) of large animals, like cows, has been going on for years. But with cattle, the farmer can see when a cow is "in heat" -- ready to be bred. The mink gives no visible clues.

(more)

To work out the artificial breeding technique, Aulerich and Ringer first developed a technique for electro-ejaculating the male mink. Collected semen was put immediately into a vial. Solutions were added to dilute and "extend" the semen, since the average ejaculation was less than half a drop.

"Mink are difficult to handle and expensive to raise. They're nervous and vicious."

"In the past, we've tried tranquilizers or other methods to calm them, hoping to raise them in colonies instead of one per cage. The tranquilizers calmed the mink a little, but not enough to put two in the same cage and risk damage to the valuable pelts when the mink start fighting."

With artificial breeding techniques now developed, the MSU scientists hope they can breed more calmness into mink either by selecting for this trait or by cross-breeding with closely related, but calmer, animals.

But mink's relatives aren't too desirable. The mink is a carnivore. Its shirt-tail relatives include martens, weasels and ferrets.

The ferret might be a possibility. Aulerich and Ringer are seriously thinking about trying to cross one of these with the mink to see if they can get offspring that have the ferret's calm disposition and the mink's high fur quality.

(more)

"In a way, we're a little apprehensive about crossing the ferret and the mink," said Aulerich. "We're not sure if people would want to buy a fur coat made from an animal produced by this cross."

Why not?

"Because if we crossed the two, we'd probably call the offspring a fink!"

#jjmarks#

Note in this story...

Transitions--so the article always keeps moving forward.

They are used to add to, illustrate or extend a point--and, furthermore, also, nor, or, moreover, along with, etc.

They summarize--at last, so, finally, all in all, etc.

They establish time--that evening, now, then, not until, etc.

They link cause and effect--as a result, that produced, consequently, etc.

They refer back--they, those, these, that, few, who, whom, except for, etc.

They restrict and qualify--provided, in case, unless, only if, etc.

Interest-building devices--personalization of scientist and his work, quotes, human interest.

Purpose--to get people to read and learn about research that could be quite technical; we took an approach we thought would be more appealing than straight scientific jargon.

Kicker--note the last sentence. That's our punch-line. It's another technique to help the reader remember the story.

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